The Colorado Health Foundation™



How and Why We'll Be Engaging Deeper in Communities across Colorado

Last year, I was fortunate to participate in the #HealthiestCO Statewide Listening Tour with our President and CEO Karen McNeil-Miller. We wanted to hear from residents across the state, but also experience where and how our fellow Coloradans live. We wanted to meet people where they are. We hosted morning, afternoon and evening sessions. We gathered in wedding venues in Broomfield and Longmont, at the local fairgrounds in Fairplay, the botanic garden in Grand Junction and a private respite home in Steamboat.

One of my most vivid memories is from a small session in Walden. We met a handful of local leaders for breakfast at the North Park Medical Clinic that offers integrated care options for the town's population of just more than 600. We chatted informally, with home baked goods before us, as patients gathered in the clinic reception area. The conversation was upbeat, but real.

The people of this small, tight-knit community struggle with access to fresh food. Residents drive about 60 miles just to access a pharmacy. Think about what a 60 mile trek is like for a parent with a sick child – a trip that may be met with other challenges such as hazardous road conditions, work or child care conflicts and more. Afterward, much like every conversation and session on the tour, we drove away wondering: how can we use our resources to make the biggest impact on health in this community?

Karen described the tour as an opportunity "to listen to the heartbeat of the state through the voices of its people." For many of us, it affirmed things we knew, opened our eyes to things we did not, and it prompted ideas for improving our grantmaking and broadening our impact.

As a grantmaker, the Colorado Health Foundation has been supporting Colorado communities for more than a decade. The recent tour was one of many opportunities we've had to understand how communities are working toward improving the health of their families, friends and neighbors. We view experience on the ground as one critical component to informing our funding approaches. With a staff and board who are relentless and passionate about impact, how can we not?

That's why we've spent much time since the tour considering how we, as a grantmaker, can support every Coloradan – no matter where they live in the state – to be healthier.

In the last year, we have expanded our traditional purview of health to include physical, mental and behavioral health and the social factors affecting health. We've made a commitment to help Coloradans live their healthiest lives by advancing opportunities to pursue good health and achieve health equity. Today, we're at yet another important milestone in organizational transition.

In an effort to have a greater impact on our mission, we've been honing our thinking about how we can work with and in communities across the state. We've adopted a new model that will allow us to practice a consistent and intentional approach to community engagement. Most recently, our Community Investment & Impact team, which includes more than 20 program officers, has been restructured and is now orienting to a new way of operating in communities to better support our mission.

Reorganizing how our staff work naturally creates some disruption for our partners and grantees. That's why we're committing the next several weeks to communicate directly with grantees about changes to their primary points of contact.

If you are a current grantee, you can count on a conversation about this very soon. While the nature of an existing grant will not change, it's possible that the person you work with here at the Foundation will. The program officer you've worked with until now will introduce you to your new point of contact, who will work to develop or deepen the relationship we have with you.

Here are a couple other key ways that our organizational engagement will shift:

- **Refined and new focus areas:** Last year, our Board refined the Foundation's strategic intent. As a result, we are no longer organizing our work around the three outcome areas of *Healthy Living*, *Health Care* and *Health Coverage.* Going forward, we will align our work to specific focus areas. Our new focus areas are as follows:
    - **Access to Care**
    - **Healthy Behaviors**
    - **Healthy Children and Adolescents**
    - **Healthy Communities**
    - **Mental and Behavioral Health**
    - **Social Determinants of Health**

- **New geographic approach:** In their evolving role, our staff will extend their geographic reach to help us ensure that we are taking an intentional statewide approach. While our Foundation is headquartered in Denver, we are committed - more than ever before - to being present in and deeply engaged with communities throughout the state.

We are genuinely excited about this new way of working. In the coming weeks, we'll be sharing more information about our approach to community engagement. In the meantime, I encourage you to Show email or your currently assigned program officer if you'd like to discuss further. We look forward to seeing you out on the road.

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Blog

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